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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002813

SIPDIS

USCINCEUR FOR DCINC

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TAGS: [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PINS](#) [IV](#) [NI](#) [UV](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA WANTS TIME TO IMPLEMENT BAKASSI RULING

REFS: A) ABUJA 2800, B) ABUJA 2787,
C) USDAO ABUJA 2723, D) ABUJA 2721,
E) USDEL SECRETARY 36, F) YAOUNDE 3401,
G) STATE 196196

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons:
1.5(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: MFA convokes Ambassador, asserts GON will eschew force in Bakassi, whatever the ICJ decides, as long as Cameroon does the same. However, Abuja will want "time to study the verdict," a Joint Implementation Committee and a second summit. "Provocation" and "atrocities committed" by Cameroonian gendarmes was Nigeria's justification for putting military forces into Bakassi nearly a decade ago, and other senior GON officials have sounded harder lines. Hence, the MFA demarche is not entirely reassuring as a bellwether of events to come. End Summary.

12. (C) Acting on "instructions from a very high level," MFA Permanent Secretary Dan Hart October 7 convoked the Ambassador to "apprise [Nigeria's] friends of our reaction" to the impending ICJ ruling on the Cameroon/Nigeria border. DCM accompanied the Ambassador; Hart was alone. Hart said the importance of the GON message was such that it should normally have been conveyed by a Minister, but both Sule Lamido and Dubem Onyia were abroad, so it fell to him.

13. (C) Intimating that Abuja believed that the ICJ's decision would go against Nigeria, Hart said Nigeria would "ask for time to study the verdict." The GON sought a "joint implementation committee" to manage the post-decision process and might ask UNSYG Annan "to convene another summit." Nigeria would continue with all confidence-building measures, ongoing and planned, Hart assured.

14. (C) Ambassador Jeter replied that the USG looked with favor on the revitalization of the Nigerian-Cameroonian Bilateral Commission. Hart confirmed that the September 29-30 Ministerial meeting in Abuja had gone well. Hart explained that, contrary to some media reports, Cameroonian President Paul Biya had never been expected at the session. The State Visit to Nigeria discussed during the 5 September bilateral Summit in Paris was envisaged for later in the year.

15. (C) The Ambassador remarked that the Paris meeting was a good start to a critical bilateral dialogue. The U.S. knew of and appreciated Nigeria's previous efforts to initiate bilateral negotiations, and we commended the GOF and UNSYG for their facilitation of discussions now underway. We hoped for continued (bilateral) progress toward a mutually-acceptable outcome, regardless of the verdict.

16. (C) Hart agreed that this process was "in the African spirit of brotherhood" and averred that Nigeria would continue to pursue it. "It cannot be otherwise," he continued. "In view of the role we play, we cannot be seen to be belligerent." However, he warned, if Cameroon were to prove belligerent, "we are capable of standing up for ourselves."

17. (C) Responding to a question from the Ambassador, Hart opined that the French could have done more to encourage bilateral dialogue. The economic relationship between France and Nigeria should have made France "more positively assertive earlier." But

Hart acknowledged the accuracy of French claims that Biya was reclusive and often obdurate and commented that a good personal relationship between Presidents Chirac and Obasanjo had helped.

18. (C) COMMENT: The case before the ICJ covers the border from Lake Chad to the Gulf of Guinea. However, control of Bakassi and the adjacent waters lies at the heart of the dispute. Hart's demarche suggests that the GON intends to delay functional implementation of an ICJ decision that goes against Nigeria on the core Bakassi issue as long as it possibly can. Given the stresses and constraints the ongoing electoral season imposes, the GON stance should be understood in Yaounde as about the most forthcoming Nigeria can be at this time. Others in the GON, including the influential Minister of Defense (REF A) and his senior deputy (REF B) have taken much harder lines. As we have reported previously, it is an article of faith among most Nigerians, including their elected representatives (REF B) that Bakassi is part of Nigeria. No government facing a near-term election, especially one as embattled as Obasanjo's, can afford to concede the correctness of an ICJ decision that goes against Nigeria. Given the ever-present danger of a military skirmish or an incident between GOC forces and Nigerian civilians escalating into something worse -- a danger that will be heightened by the decision, no matter its beneficiary -- the importance of restraint and bilateral negotiations (REF G) probably can never be repeated too often.

19. (C-Rel NATO) DATT COMMENT: Recent DAO Yaounde and Abuja reporting contradicts Hart's assertion of a GOC build-up of forces in the Bakassi.

JETER